

REMARKS

Claims 5-27 are pending in this application. By this Amendment, Claims 5, 10, 11, 14 and 15 are amended, and Claims 18-27 are added. Favorable reconsideration is respectfully requested in light of the following Remarks.

The Office Action rejects Claims 5-17 under 35 U.S.C. §103(a) over Kubota et al. (U.S. Patent No. 6,333,515, hereinafter “Kubota”) in view of Kreuzer et al. (U.S. Patent No. 5,901,976, hereinafter “Kreuzer”). The rejection is respectfully traversed.

Independent Claim 5 specifies, *inter alia*, a lining for columns of automobiles, comprising a base area, an opening area for covering an airbag, and a hinge area disposed between and adjoining the base area and opening area, wherein the hinge area is coplanar along a surface of the base area and the opening area, and wherein the hinge area is made of a material having a different hardness than the base area and the opening area.

In one embodiment, Kubota discloses a vehicle occupant protecting apparatus housed in a pillar garnish 60 formed by a base member 62 and an outer skin 44. A plurality of slits 64 correspond to a weakened portion formed in a connecting portion between a base portion 62A and a bag housing portion 62B in the base member 62. A mounting seat 66 is fixed to a convex portion 52 in a pillar inner panel 34 by means of a resin clip 68. The slits 64 serve as a hinge when the air bag is deployed. *See Figs. 5 and 6; col. 16, line 56-col. 17, line 21.*

Kreuzer discloses an airbag lid 1 comprising a lower layer 2 of soft and resilient plastic and an outer layer 3 of hard plastic. Layers 2 and 3 are essentially fastened together adhering totally surface to surface. *See col. 2, lines 3-8.*

It is respectfully submitted that the combination of Kubota and Kreuzer does not disclose, teach or suggest all the claim limitations, as recited in Claim 5. Specifically, it is respectfully submitted that at least the feature of a hinge area disposed between and adjoining the base area and opening area, wherein the hinge area is coplanar along a surface of the base area and the opening area, and wherein the hinge area is made of a material having a different hardness than the base area and the opening area, is not disclosed, taught or suggested in the applied art. Because the combination of the cited references does not teach all the claim

limitations, as recited in Claim 5, the Office action fails to establish a *prima facie* case of obviousness. *See MPEP §2143*.

For at least this reason, Claim 5 is allowable over the applied art, taken singly or in combination. Claims 6-9, which depend from Claim 5, are likewise allowable over the applied art, taken singly or in combination. Withdrawal of the rejection is respectfully requested.

Independent Claim 10 specifies, *inter alia*, a lining for columns of automobiles, comprising a base area, and an opening area for covering an airbag, wherein the opening area is coplanar along a surface of the base area and comprises a first material having a first hardness, except for a hinge area comprising a second material having a second hardness being different than the first hardness.

It is respectfully submitted that the combination of Kubota and Kreuzer does not disclose, teach or suggest all the claim limitations, as recited in Claim 10. Specifically, it is respectfully submitted that at least the feature of an opening area coplanar along a surface of the base area and comprising a first material having a first hardness, except for a hinge area comprising a second material having a second hardness being different than the first hardness, is not disclosed, taught or suggested in the applied art. Because the combination of the cited references does not teach all the claim limitations, as recited in Claim 10, the Office action fails to establish a *prima facie* case of obviousness. *See MPEP §2143*.

For at least this reason, Claim 10 is allowable over the applied art, taken singly or in combination. Claims 11-17, which depend from Claim 10, are likewise allowable over the applied art, taken singly or in combination. Withdrawal of the rejection is respectfully requested.

New independent Claim 18 specifies, *inter alia*, a trim panel having an inner surface and an outer surface, comprising a base portion, an opening portion, and a hinge portion disposed between and adjoining the base portion and the opening portion, wherein at least one of the inner surface and the outer surface is coplanar, and wherein the hinge portion is made of a material having a different hardness than the base portion and the opening portion.

It is respectfully submitted that the combination of Kubota and Kreuzer does not disclose, teach or suggest all the claim limitations, as recited in Claim 18. Specifically, it is respectfully submitted that at least the feature of a hinge portion disposed between and adjoining the base portion and the opening portion, wherein at least one of the inner surface and the outer surface is coplanar, and wherein the hinge portion is made of a material having a different hardness than the base portion and the opening portion, is not disclosed, taught or suggested in the applied art. Because the combination of the cited references does not teach all the claim limitations, Claim 18 is allowable over the applied art, taken singly or in combination.

Applicants, therefore, respectfully submit that the application is in condition for allowance. Favorable consideration and prompt allowance of the application is earnestly solicited.

Should Examiner Fleming believe anything further would be desirable in order to place the application in better condition for allowance; the Examiner is invited to contact the undersigned attorney at the telephone number listed below.

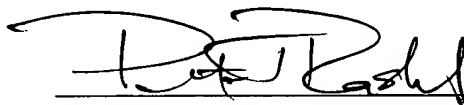
It is believed that any additional fees due with respect to this paper have already been identified. However, if any additional fees are required in connection with the filing of this paper, permission is given to charge account number 18-0013 in the name of Rader, Fishman and Grauer PLLC.

Respectfully submitted,

Dated: March 31, 2004

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SIGNATURE OF PRACTITIONER

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